

Manchester spending cuts hit most vulnerable

Our reporters
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Among the £109 million in cuts being made this year by the Labour Party-run Manchester City Council is a huge reduction to its £35.7 million Supporting People budget. The original cut to the service was to be £12.6 million. The council then announced this was “undeliverable without serious consequences” and said it would “top up” the Supporting People budget by an amount of £4 million. However, this still results in a cut in the budget of £8.6 million (more than 25 percent) over two years.

These cuts are being implemented to services that are used by what the council acknowledges as “14,000 of the most marginalised citizens in the city”. According to the council, the Supporting People budget “allows vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence”.

The loss of such services will badly affect people with mental health issues, homeless families, young care leavers, drug and alcohol dependent people, women and children victims of domestic violence and ex-offenders.

Announcing the cuts the council said, “In order to manage this level of reduction, the Directorate will *redefine Adult Social Care overall and also manage the risks going forward*”. [Emphasis added]. This is hardly disguised code for the gutting of resources and the permanent removal of services that have been built up in the city over decades.

Among the services threatened with closure is Newbury House.

The facility has operated in Manchester since 1973 and provides, for a 12-month period, a supported alcohol-free environment for 16 residents with alcohol dependency issues. Today Newbury House is run on behalf of the council by the Riverside social housing agency.

Alongside this recovery therapy, residents are also given advice on social security issues including housing benefit claims and other housing matters. Advice about health care services and the resolution of financial problems are also available, as is access to further education and resettlement in the community.

Newbury House is a Grade II listed building with pleasant surrounding grounds and provides a relaxing environment for its residents. The house was recently refurbished with a

grant from the Homes and Communities Agency and the National Treatment Agency.

Newbury House is in the Victoria Park area of the Ardwick ward where Robert Skelton is standing as the Socialist Equality Party candidate in the May 5 local elections. Skelton visited the centre last week and spoke to residents. Two Newbury residents, Ronnie and Rick, spoke to a WSWs reporting team about the council’s plan to close the facility and the devastating impact this will have.

Ronnie said, “I am a tenant and have been here for eight years as I have health problems. At my age, 71, if I had to leave, it would be to go into sheltered housing. The bigger picture is the rest of the tenants here, as most of them are homeless. Everybody is on tenterhooks and nobody knows what they are doing next.

“Alcoholics do a 12-month recovery programme in here. We have group work in the morning, and in the afternoon you go out and do voluntary work in the local area and courses, etc. Everyone that comes in here gets stabilised. And then people can move onto a second stage.

“But with these cuts, this is down for closure in June, along with two other projects; a women’s project around the corner and another project.

“The success rate here is unbelievable. They’ve had it since 1973 and thousands have come through here and made progress. Loads of people have moved on, gone back with their families, got themselves on their feet. They are no longer a nuisance to the public. Being here stops all the costs like the cost of keeping them in prison, health costs, so it is a good project.

“Riverside, a massive housing association, has this place as it amalgamated with English Church Housing who had run it. I think Riverside might have other ideas for this place. This is a rehabilitation centre with a high success rate. We are not getting told whether this is closing or staying open. They forget that there are people in here with absolutely nowhere to go.

“Everyone has been given housing forms to fill in and, as you know, you won’t get a house in six weeks or with 28 days notice. So what they will do is move people into hostels

where you can drink and take drugs and nobody bothers. So they are going to send these sober people back into a crisis situation.

“They got the money for the renovation, which was £1.2 million on the basis that it was going to remain a rehab centre because it’s got such a success rate. People down the years can still talk about what it’s done for them.

“The staff will also be made redundant. One of the workers has been here for 14 years, she takes the groups. Another, our cook, has 22 years of service here. And they help in other ways. You can talk to the staff about anything.

“There are people who have never heard of Newbury, yet it’s saved so many people’s lives”.

Rick said, “They are shutting this place for the want of £108,000. It’s been open 37 years. It’s a resource for Manchester, a rehab, a dry house. If you take a drink you are out of the door. And Riverside, who run the place, is, as the expression goes, cash rich. It did better than a billion pounds in 2009/2010 we are told. Riverside gets grants from Supporting People so they are having to make closures.

“They run other services but none of them provide the services that Newbury does. They are making the cuts, they say, on the basis of the fewest people affected, but what we’re concerned about is that once Newbury shuts it won’t be re-opened. Newbury is really a poor man’s Priory [a famous private rehabilitation hospital in North London]. There is no other facility. If you’ve no money and want treatment, there will be nowhere to go in Manchester.

“So unless you’ve got a lot of money you are not going to get this sort of treatment. This is a place specifically set up for homeless people that want to stop drinking and maintain their sobriety. And the year you spend here dovetails with the amount of time it usually takes to get re-housed anyway.

“What they are proposing is that when they shut this place, they will keep beds open in other places. But they are not dry projects. They have young offenders in them with drug issues and all sorts. And they are for the under 25s so are quite rowdy places. So anyone who doesn’t get re-housed from here will be dumped in one of those places.

“This place is not just a dry house, it’s a community. Lifelong friendships are made in here. It’s also a crisis management centre, and people going through hard times can come back in order to maintain their sobriety. I’ve heard guys who were in here 30 years ago, and no one has a bad word to say about the place.

“I think Riverside is using the cuts in order to shut the place and to re-open it and make money off it. We’ve been told they could make £250 a day on rent for this place.

“In terms of the money that the council will save on this place, it’s nothing. What is £108,000? They are using the

cuts as a pretext to shut the place and to make more money from it. That is what I believe anyway.

“We had Bernard Priest [a Labour Party councillor for Ardwick who voted for the cuts] here and the best he would say was he ‘would look into it’. We had Tony Lloyd here [Member of Parliament for Manchester Central, which covers Ardwick] and we got a similar response from him. The decision won’t be taken till June 14. But Manchester City Council does so much business with Riverside, so what will happen? We don’t know.

“We could be out by the middle of July if we get 28 days notice. There is nothing to stop them issuing bailiffs notices to get us out because we are on licence and have no rights at all.

“It’s money well spent on Newbury. I think the figure is £5 saved for every £1 spent on treatment. It’s been quietly getting on with sobering up homeless drunks for 37 years and it works. With these other two centres that are down to close, there are like for like alternatives. I don’t think any should close. In fact there should be more money made available to them.

“But there isn’t another Newbury House. It’s unique, and once it goes, it’s not coming back”.

The reporting team asked what they thought about the fact that the cuts were being imposed as a direct result of the more than £1 trillion pounds bailout of the bankers, following the 2008 world financial crash.

Rick said, “You don’t need to convince me. Tesco [Britain’s largest supermarket chain] just published their profits; they made £36 billion. One of the other residents here was showing us the Forbes Rich List and said, ‘They could pay off all of what they are cutting and still have three quarters of their wealth left over’”.



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